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7181/1 Introductory Topics in Psychology
Report on the Examination

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7181/1

Introductory Topics in Psychology

General

The overall performance indicated that many students had prepared well for this examination. There were relatively few scripts with unanswered questions and little evidence that students had run out of time. Questions that tended to differentiate best were questions 1.2, 3, 8, 11 and 12. Performance on these questions suggested that many students should work to improve the higher order skills of application and evaluation/discussion. For the latter, it is important to stress the need to present contextualised arguments rather than generic points which do not constitute effective discussion.

Many answers suffered because students did not pay close attention to the question; time was often wasted on general pre-prepared but irrelevant description, for example, of the original Asch study or the multistore model of memory.

Students should be reminded of the need to ensure that they do not write outside the spaces provided in the answer booklet, and should request additional sheets if necessary.

Section A Social Influence

Question 1.1

Many students were able to name three relevant behaviours, and although most chose to use those named on the specification, other legitimate behaviours, such as self-sacrifice, were credited. Some students presented broader concepts related to minority influence, eg the snowball effect, which were not credited as they are not ways of behaving that could be demonstrated by a minority wishing to influence a majority.

Question 1.2

This question was answered with varying degrees of success. Many students simply embellished or elaborated their answer to 1.1, typically stating that 'Marcus should show consistency by being consistent in his point of view.' Better responses explained clearly what Marcus could do to show his consistency in a practical sense, for example, 'He would repeat to his friends over and over how good it would be to go travelling.' Of the three behaviours, applications that were most successful tended to be those explaining how Marcus would show flexibility. Some students chose to illustrate commitment by offering implausible and probably ineffective suggestions, for example, that Marcus could go on hunger strike or refuse to speak to his friends to persuade them to go travelling.

Question 2.1

Just under a third of the responses were incorrect.

Question 2.2

The majority of answers were correct, but a number of students suggested incorrect modes. A few students calculated means here.

Question 2.3

Many students gained full marks for this question by offering the mean and median as alternatives. Some explanations suggested that it is necessary to arrange scores in chronological (rather than numerical) order to work out the median. Of those using the range, several mistakenly asserted that the range should be calculated by taking the highest number from the lowest. Very few students referred to the standard deviation or graphical representations. Where students showed explicit calculations these were used to credit the mark for explaining how the statistics should be calculated in the absence of any verbal explanation. Those few students who did not answer were presumably confused by the term 'descriptive statistics'.

Question 3

This question was generally quite poorly answered. Although many students could gain some credit by suggesting that self-report often involved questionnaires and interviews, many confused self-report with peer review or report writing. A number of students offered pre-learned evaluative points that did not gain credit.

Question 4

Many students started their response with a detailed and unnecessary description of Asch's original study, before eventually getting round to describing Asch's variations in answer to the question. Group size, unanimity and task difficulty were the most common variables presented. Some students evidently misunderstood the term 'variables' in the question, incorrectly assuming that this was a reference to informational and normative social influence. Although the question clearly required an outline rather than a discussion, some students wasted time explaining possible reasons for increased or decreased conformity in variations of the study. The limitations tended to be sensible although they were not always sufficiently elaborated or explained. Completely generic limitations were not creditworthy. Sometimes limitations were conflated, for example, when discussing the time bound nature of Asch's findings some students offered Perrin and Spencer's alternative findings as an elaboration, apparently failing to realise that this research better illustrates the problem of the combined effect of individual differences in competence and the nature of the task in Asch's findings.

Section B Memory

Question 5

Students who confined themselves to information about the characteristics of short-term memory tended to do well on this question. Whilst it was quite legitimate to focus on evidence, credit could only be awarded for the findings/conclusions of studies and not for the method. Students presenting detailed information on Baddeley's coding studies frequently misreported the outcome, stating that acoustically similar words were better recalled in short-term tasks. Unfortunately, several students misinterpreted this as a more general question about the multistore model as a whole and consequently presented a great deal of peripheral information, touching on characteristics of short-term memory, either incidentally or not at all. Another common error was to present an outline of the working memory model.

Question 6

Most students recognised this as a question about episodic, semantic and procedural memory and most could successfully identify the three types in the cases presented. Unfortunately, not all students could adequately explain how the cases presented in the stem illustrated the three types of memory. This was evident in answers that attempted to explain using the same terms, eg 'Annie's is a procedural memory because she is remembering a procedure'. It is worth noting that describing procedural memory as a 'how to' memory is somewhat ambiguous, since remembering 'how to bake a cake' could mean recalling the action of stirring the mixture (procedural memory) but is more likely to mean remembering the list of ingredients and sequence of steps involved (semantic memory). Procedural memory is much more effectively explained as an action or skills-based memory. A small number of students chose a completely alternative interpretation of the question to that intended and tried to link the three types of memory to just one of the cases in the stem. In such cases, students were credited for legitimate, plausible applications, eg 'Billy shows semantic memory because he is remembering factual information about tools and their use, he is using episodic memory because he remembers which tools he used last time he fixed a tap, and he is showing procedural memory recalling the muscle action required to use the tools'. Although it was rarely used, the term 'declarative memory' was accepted in place of either semantic or episodic memory, but not for both.

Question 7

Nearly all students managed to gain at least one mark and many gained full credit.

Question 8

Most students presented a combination of theory and research evidence. The quality of extended writing varied enormously, with many students evidently struggling to describe such abstract ideas using specialist terminology. Whilst it was quite legitimate to focus on studies of working memory, with credit awarded for what the research 'has shown', it was most appropriate to focus on the findings/conclusions rather than on elaborate detail of the method. Confusion was often evident, particularly in relation to the outcome of dual task studies. Discussions were often based on the use of evidence to support the working memory model, although explanations of how the findings supported the theory were often missing or confused, with relatively few students touching on the key issue of limited capacity. Generic evaluation points were frequently seen and did not contribute to the overall worth of answers. A number of students misinterpreted this as a question about the multistore model and a surprising number of answers included discussions of long-term memory.

Section C Attachment

Question 9

This question discriminated well with just under half the responses gaining full marks and just under half the responses gaining one mark.

Questions 10.1 and 10.2

These two questions proved to be highly accessible. Most students could answer 10.1 correctly, with slightly fewer obtaining two marks on 10.2. Although most responses to 10.2 cited Lorenz, other imprinting researchers (and their animals) were credited.

Question 11

This question often presented difficulties. Largely ineffective responses were those that included scant, if any, psychological content and consisted mostly of reiterations of the stem and vague anecdotal suggestions about past experience or growing up in a happy family. Other unsuccessful answers focussed solely on type of attachment. Many answers indicated a common misunderstanding that people either have an internal working model and so can experience healthy relationships with others, or they do not have an internal working model so cannot experience healthy relationships. There were some better responses that showed understanding and application of the internal working model as a mental construct or schema, along with an appreciation of how the model arises out of the initial attachment and how it serves as a template for future relationships.

Question 12

This question elicited some extremely detailed descriptions of the Strange Situation although, oddly, even extensive descriptions often omitted to refer to the method as controlled. Students were divided as to whether Ainsworth used a one-way or a two-way mirror. That said, descriptions were generally quite successful although there was often confusion between avoidant and resistant types. The majority of discussions were pre-prepared 'Describe and evaluate the Strange Situation' answers, whilst more successful answers explicitly addressed the matter of the appropriateness or usefulness of the procedure for measuring type of attachment. It was quite common to see discussions where students would offer cross-cultural findings of similar/different percentages of Ainsworth's three types, but would fail to make the point that such findings supported the validity of the Strange Situation, or otherwise. Many answers included lengthy discussions of the findings where it would have been much more productive to concentrate on the method. Very rarely did students compare the Strange Situation with other ways of measuring type of attachment. The least successful discussions tended to consist of completely generic points about ethics and lack of ecological validity.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.

Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

UMS conversion calculator